

# Gun-Fighters of the Old West

WILLIAM YANCEY SHACKLEFORD

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### I.

The first of the old-time Western outlaws was a shadowy figure named Meason, first heard of as a robber on the Ohio River about 1800. Meason lived in a cavern known as Rock Cave, in the bank of the Ohio River about 20 miles below the mouth of the Wabash. The cave was a two-storied affair, an admirable retreat for Meason and his gang of river pirates.

At this period a great many Southern adventurers were crossing the Appalachian Mountains and exploring the new states of Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi, some even wandering down into Louisiana and Texas—the region then known as the Far West. There were no regular roads or highways, and most travelers came in keel-boats or flatboats on the rivers. Others walked or rode horses along the old river trails or "traces." These people were frontiersmen of the toughest sort, all armed to the teeth and prepared to use their weapons on the slightest provocation. But the criminals who preyed upon them were tougher still.

Nobody ever knew just how many men were members of Meason's band. It has been said that he often had 100 mounted bandits camping in Rock Cave at one time. This is probably an exaggeration, but the gang was strong enough to stop big flatboats on the river, murder the crews and carry off anything of value that they could find in the wreckage. Groups of horsemen were attacked as they camped along the traces. Poor men traveling on foot were ambushed and murdered, even though they carried no treasure beyond their firearms and scanty camping equipment.

Meason's murderers prospered for nearly a decade, looted many river boats, and murdered several hundred travelers. But finally the Ohio country became too populous for Meason's purposes, so he left Rock Cave and moved down into the wilds of Mississippi. The Indian lands in this region were just being opened up for settlement, and Meason and his followers operated very much as they had in the Ohio country, robbing and killing newcomers along the famous Natchez-to-Nashville trace. The Mississippi authorities offered a large reward for Meason's arrest, but the officers were unable to capture him for a long time. Finally two of Meason's lieutenants—some say that one of them was Meason's illegitimate son—decided to turn him in and collect the reward. They tried to bind him with a rope, but were unsuccessful. In the fight which followed, one of them killed Meason with a hatchet.

The assassins cut off the leader's head and carried it in a buckskin sack to the town of Washington, Miss., where they planned to show the gruesome trophy to the Governor and collect the reward. The local authorities, however, recognized the two gunmen and clapped them into jail at once. Several weeks later they were duly tried and convicted of murder, and the sheriff hanged them to a liveoak tree amid general rejoicing. The Meason gang never amounted to much after this disaster. The members separated and vanished into the wilderness. Some of them united with other bands of marauders, but these groups were nothing at all as compared with the original Meason organization.

The only members of Meason's gang who attained any independent notoriety were the Harp brothers, known as Big Harp and Little Harp. These two ruffians, accompanied by three or four women, camped near

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JUL 19 1945 PUBL

533990

many of the pioneer settlements along the Kentucky border. They claimed to have come from North Carolina about 1804, but nothing is known of them previous to their association with Meason.

The polish and urbanity that some legends have attributed to the vague character of Meason were altogether foreign to the Harp brothers. They were filthy, savage beasts, ignorant as dogs and probably mental defectives. Their women were coarse and brutal, one of them feeble-minded. Both men and women, according to the chroniclers of the time, "devoted all their leisure time to riot, drunkenness and debauchery."

The authorities arrested the whole Harp family once, charging them with the murder of a young Virginian, the son of Colonel F. E. Langford. The Harps swore they knew nothing of this crime, although Langford's blood-stained clothing was found in their possession, together with a quantity of gold coin such as he was known to have carried. Thrown into jail at Danville, Ky., the Harps escaped and fled to Columbia, where they murdered a small boy in order to get possession of a sack of cornmeal he was carrying. They also tortured a young girl and finally killed her with a tomahawk, apparently for no reason at all. "They seem inspired with the deadliest hatred against all mankind," says a contemporary account, "and such is their implacable misanthropy that they are known to kill when there is no temptation to rob."

Once the two Harp brothers rode up to the cabin of William Stagg, who was away from home. Mrs. Stagg was there, however, with four young children. The Harps posed as Methodist preachers, and it is supposed that Mrs. Stagg invited them into the house. When William Stagg returned a day or two later, he found the cabin burned to the ground, and the bodies of his wife and children in the ashes. It appeared that they had been killed with an axe or tomahawk, as each skull was split open.

Stagg got his best friend, a Captain Leeper, to go with him in pursuit of the Harps. Little Harp escaped them, but Captain Leeper shot Big Harp off his horse, and the fall somehow broke his leg. Harp was not mortally hurt, but was helpless by reason of the broken leg, and Leeper had disarmed him, except for a small Derringer pistol hidden in his boot. Harp begged Leeper not to kill him, and Leeper was inclined to turn him over to the authorities for trial. But as soon as Stagg rode up and saw Harp he shot the bandit through the neck, before he could draw the pistol which he had concealed from Leeper. The two of them cut off Harp's head and stuck it on the end of a pole. Then they rode from cabin to cabin for several days, showing the bloody trophy to the settlers. Tiring of this, they set the pole up near a ford, at a place which was known as Harp's Head for many years thereafter. Little Harp was hanged several years later, by a sheriff's posse somewhere in Mississippi.

## II.

The first really big-time criminal of this period was the famous John A. Murrell, who showed up in eastern Arkansas about 1830. Surprisingly little is known about Murrell, although he is remembered even today in certain quarters, and children are still frightened by "Murrell stories" in some parts of the rural South. He began as a common horse-thief with about a dozen followers, but soon began to steal Negro slaves as well, and devoted his spare moments to highway robbery which often involved murder. Several of Murrell's men were expert counterfeiters, and all the gang passed bogus money when the opportunity presented itself.

In a few years Murrell built up an association of more than 2,000 men, scattered over Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Louisiana. Some of these were men of position and influence, the scions of rich and prominent families. Many of them worked with

Murrell's gang for years without ever having seen their chief. A number of prominent Southerners, long afterward, confessed on their deathbeds that they had once been members of Murrell's secret fraternity.

Murrell was one of the most thorough-going scoundrels who ever lived, but he was not an ignorant brutal ruffian like the Harp brothers. Alexander Hynds, of Tennessee, had this to say of his character "Nature had done much for Murrell. He had a quick mind, a fine natural address and great adaptability. He was as much at ease among the refined and cultured as with his own gang. He made a special study of criminal law, and knew something of medicine. He often palmed himself off as a preacher, and preached in large camp-meetings, and some were converted under his ministry! He often used his clerical garb in passing counterfeit money. With a clear head, cool, fine judgment, and a nature utterly without fear, moral or physical, his power over his men never waned. To them he was just, fair and amiable. He took great pride in his position and the operations of his gang. This conceit was the only weak spot in his nature, and led to his downfall."

Several books and many stories have been written about the Murrell gang, but the most sensational account was a book called *Life and Adventures of Virgil A. Stewart*, published by Harpers, New York, in 1836. Stewart was a Mississippi detective who usually called himself Hughes—a vain, boastful fellow whose statements must always be taken with a grain of salt. However, it was Stewart and his book that finally overthrew the great Murrell, and broke up the most powerful association of criminals ever assembled in America up to that time.

Stewart had joined Murrell's band, and became so intimately acquainted with the outlaw that the latter recounted a great many facts about his early life. "I was born in middle Tennessee," said Murrell. "My parents had not much property, but they were intelligent people. My father was an honest man, I expect, and tried to raise me honest, but I think none the better of him for that. My mother was the *pure grit*, and she learned all her children to steal as soon as we could walk. At ten years old I was not a bad hand. The first good haul I made was from a peddler who lodged at my father's house one night."

Later on, while traveling through the country with a ruffian named Crenshaw, young Murrell got into a tight place. "We stole a Negro man," he said, "and pushed for Mississippi. We had promised him that we would conduct him to a free state if he would let us sell him once on our way, and we also agreed to give him part of the money. We sold him for \$600, but when we went to start the Negro seemed to be very uneasy, and appeared to doubt our coming back for him as we had promised." Murrell and Crenshaw came back for him, all right, and started on their way, only to learn that the owner was advertising for the Negro, and publishing descriptions of the two outlaws who had stolen him. The danger now was that the Negro would be recaptured, and would squeal on Murrell and Crenshaw. "It was rather squally times," said Murrell in relating the incident to Stewart, "so we took the Negro out to the bank of a creek, and Crenshaw shot him through the head. We took out his entrails and sunk him in the creek."

On another occasion Murrell and his brother stole five Negroes—a man and woman, and their three sons. "We promised them that, if they would work for us one year after we got to Texas, we would let them go free, and we told them many fine stories. The old Negro became suspicious that we were going to sell him, and grew quite contrary. So we landed one day by the side of an island, and I requested him to go with me round the point to catch some fish. Once away from our company, I shot him through the head, then ripped open his belly and tumbled him into the river. We told the others that the Negro had fallen into the water, and that he never came up after he went under. We sold our Negroes to a Frenchman for \$1900, fifty miles above New Orleans."

"Later on," continues the Murrell narrative, "I decoyed a Negro from

his master in middle Tennessee, and sent him to Mills Point by a young man, while I waited to see the movements of the owner. He thought his Negro had run off, so I started to take possession of my prize. I got another friend at Mills Point to take the Negro in a skiff, and convey him to the mouth of Red River, while I took passage on a steamboat. I then went through the country by land, and sold my Negro for \$900, and the second night after I stole him again, and my friend ran him to the Irish Bayou in Texas. I then followed on after him, and sold my Negro in Texas for \$500."

Murrell's men were generally known as "speculators" or "road agents"—note the use of the former term in the following passage. "As I was riding along, planning for my designs, I was overtaken by a tall and good-looking young man, riding an elegant horse, which was splendidly rigged out. The young gentleman's apparel was of the gayest that could be had, and his watch-chain and other jewelry were of the richest and best. He said he had been to the lower country with a drove of Negroes, and to hear us talk, we were very rich. I felt him out on the subject of speculation, but he cursed the speculators, and said he was in a bad condition to fall into the hands of such villians, as he had the cash with him that twenty Negroes had sold for, and that he was very glad to get in company with me through the Nations. I concluded he was a noble prize, and longed to be counting his cash. At length I became very thirsty and insisted on turning down a deep hollow that headed near the road, to hunt some water. We had followed down the dale for about four hundred yards, when I drew my pistol and shot him through the head. He fell dead, and I commenced hunting for his cash. I opened his large pocketbook, which was stuffed very full; and when I began to open it I thought it was a treasure indeed. But oh, the contents of that book! It was richly filled with the copies of love-songs, the forms of love-letters, and some of his own composition, but no cash. I began to cut off his clothes with my knife, and examine them for his money, but I found four dollars and a half in his pockets, and no more. And is this the amount for which twenty Negroes sold? thought I. I recollected his watch and jewelry, and I gathered them in; the chain was rich and good, but it swung to an old brass watch. He was a puff for true. All such fools ought to die as soon as possible."

It was about this time that Murrell, who was a member of several fraternal orders, decided to organize his followers into a secret fraternity with signs, grips, passwords and the like. "I remained at home but a short time, as I could not rest when my mind was not engaged in some speculation," he told Stewart. "I commenced the foundation of the Mystic Clan, and suggested the plan of exciting a rebellion among the Negroes as the sure road to an inexhaustible fortune for all who would engage in the expedition. The first mystic sign which is used by this clan was in use among robbers before I was born; the second had its origin from myself, Phelps, Haines, Cooper, Doris, Bolton, Harris, Doddridge, Kelly, Morris, Walton, Depont and one of my brothers. We needed a higher order to carry on our designs, and we adopted our sign, calling it the Sign of the Grand Council of the Mystic Clan. We practiced ourselves to give and receive the new sign to a fraction before we parted. In addition to this improvement, we invented a mode of corresponding by means of ten characters, mixed with other matter, which has been very convenient on many occasions, and especially when any of us get into difficulties."

The great strength of Murrell's gang lay in its utter ruthlessness. A true Murrell man never forgot that dead men tell no tales, and never hesitated to kill anybody who might betray him. "This fellow Phelps," Murrell said of a fellow-highwayman, "will never do for a robber, because he cannot kill a man unless he has received an injury from him first. He is now in jail at Vicksburg, and I fear will hang. He is a noble chap among the Negroes, and he wants them all free, and knows how to excite them as well as anybody, therefore I should like to

save him. I went to see him 'not long ago, at the jail, but he is so strictly watched that nothing can be done. He has been in the habit of stopping men on the highway, and robbing them, and then letting them go free—but that will never do for a speculator. After I rob a man he will never give evidence against me. There is but one safe plan in this business, and that is to kill. If I could not afford to kill a man, I would not rob him."

Murrell's chief purpose in life was to lead the Negroes in a great uprising against the whites. It has been said that some of Murrell's men were sincere about this—fanatical abolitionists of the John Brown type. It may be so. But the great majority, like Murrell himself, were interested only in the loot they expected to get out of it. "The great object that we have in contemplation," said Murrell, "is to excite a rebellion among the Negroes throughout the slave-holding states. Our plan is to manage so as to have it commence everywhere at the same hour. We have set on the 25th of December, 1835, for the time to commence our operations. We design having our companies so stationed over the country, in the vicinity of the banks and large cities, that when the Negroes commence their carnage and slaughter, we will have detachments to fire the towns and rob the banks while all is confusion and dismay. The rebellion taking place everywhere at once, every part of the country will be engaged in its own defense; and one part of the country can afford no relief to another, until many places will be entirely overrun by the Negroes, and our pockets replenished from the banks and desks of rich merchants' houses. The Negroes will murder thousands, and huddle the remainder into large bodies of stationary defense for their own preservation."

Stewart quotes Murrell at some length about the details of his propaganda among the slaves. "We do not go to every Negro we see and tell him about the rebellion. We find the most vicious and wickedly disposed on large farms, and poison their minds against their masters by telling how they are mistreated. When we are convinced that we have found a blood-thirsty devil, we swear him to secrecy and disclose to him the secret. We convince him that every other state and section of the country where there are any Negroes will rebel and slay all the whites they can on the night of Dec. 25th, 1835, and assure him that there are thousands of white men engaged in trying to free them, who will die by their sides in battle. We have a long ceremony for the oath, which is administered in the presence of a terrific picture painted for that purpose. This picture is highly calculated to make a Negro true to his trust, for he is disposed to be superstitious at best."

Murrell seems never to have doubted the success of his slave rebellion. "This may seem too bold," he said when speaking of the plan to Stewart, "but that is what I glory in. All the crimes I have ever committed have been of the most daring, and I have been successful in all my attempts as yet. I am confident that I will be victorious in this matter also. I will have the pleasure and honor of knowing that by my management I have glutted the earth with more human gore, and destroyed more property, than any other robber who ever lived in America, or the known world. I look upon the American people as my common enemy. My Clan is strong, brave and experienced, and is increasing every day. I should not be surprised if we were more than 2000 strong on the 25th day of December, 1835. In addition to this, I have the advantage over any other leader of banditti that has ever preceded me, for at least one half of my Grand Council are men of high standing, and many of them in honorable and lucrative offices."

Stewart finally exposed the great conspiracy to the authorities, and Murrell was captured and sent to the Mississippi penitentiary in 1834, where he was forced to work in the prison blacksmith shop. It developed that instead of the 2000 white leaders for the slave rebellion, only about 450 were really prepared for active service, and many of these fled the country when they heard of Murrell's capture. Nothing out of the

ordinary happened on Dec. 25, 1835, but shortly afterward a few Murrell men started a riot at Vicksburg, Miss., where they murdered two prominent citizens. Five of the outlaws were hanged at once, several were shot, and others imprisoned. Murrell got out of the penitentiary in 1841, but his health was broken and his mind clouded, so that he was quite harmless. He lived only a few months after his release.

### III.

After Murrell's time, there was little organized criminal activity along the Mississippi for some years; the scene shifted to California, where hundreds of outlaws appeared immediately after the discovery of gold there in 1849. In the beginning of the gold-rush period there were no peace officers in the mining camps. Each Californian carried firearms at all times, and protected his person and property as best he could. Naturally these men soon formed cooperative groups and fraternal associations, and there was trouble whenever the interests of these organizations conflicted.

It appears that the first elected officers were nearly all criminals, and these were opposed by other outlaws who called themselves Vigilantes, also known as "stranglers" because of their custom of hanging people who opposed them. Some Californians even today regard the Vigilantes as heroes and saviors of the country. That there were many brutal robbers and murderers among them cannot be denied, since the Vigilantes themselves held periodic "purges" when they executed many of these scoundrels, whom they always called "false members." It is doubtless true also that other ruffians, who did not belong to the Vigilantes, committed crimes which were attributed to that organization.

At one period there were nearly 5000 Vigilantes in San Francisco alone, besides thousands of members and fellow-travelers in the smaller camps. These outlaws built fortified arsenals, seized firearms and cannon belonging to the militia, laughed at the territorial governor's orders, and even defied the United States government. They not only fought the city, territorial and federal authorities, but carried on long wars with rival bands of criminals and outlaws. Besides all this, they took upon themselves the punishment of criminals, claiming that the duly constituted authorities had refused to do their duty in this regard. They hanged men for breaking into houses, for stealing groceries, for arson, and for horse stealing. They hanged some murderers also, but only in cases where the murdered man was unarmed or was killed in some particularly atrocious manner. The survivor of a gun-fight in which both parties were armed, and the loser fell with a weapon in his hand, was not regarded as a murderer at all, and was seldom arrested or tried.

In 1855 three men were sentenced to death by the authorities in Los Angeles, but the Supreme Court decided that two of them should not hang. Upon this the mayor of Los Angeles resigned in a towering rage, and openly joined the outlaw Vigilantes who broke into the jail and hanged the prisoners anyhow.

In San Francisco one Charles Cora killed a United States Marshal named Richardson. Also one Jim Casey murdered James King, editor of the *San Francisco Bulletin*, Charles Cora and Casey were lodged in jail, under the protection of armed officers of the law. But twenty-four companies of Vigilantes suddenly appeared in the streets, carrying rifles and marching in military order. Led by several preachers who had turned outlaw, they dragged a cannon up to the jail, and forced the authorities to surrender Cora and Casey, who were hanged in front of the Vigilante Headquarters a little later.

The Vigilantes next began to arrest and try men for illegal voting, election frauds and the like, despite the fact that they had no legal

authority to arrest or try anybody. A pugilist known as Billy Mulligan was confined in the Vigilante Jail, charged with stuffing ballot-boxes. A judge of the California Supreme Court issued a writ of *habeas corpus*, but the Vigilantes laughed at the officer who came to serve the writ. They set up six cannon on front of the building, filled the whole place with armed men, and defied the Supreme Court. The governor of California ordered them to disband and disperse, threatening them with the militia. Their answer was to steal two shiploads of arms and ammunition, the property of the federal government. Governor Johnson then appealed to the President of the United States to send battle-ships against the outlaws, but Washington and California were a long way apart in those days, and nothing ever came of it.

It was about this time that a Vigilante named Hopkins made an insulting remark to Judge Terry, of the California Supreme Court, and the judge impulsively stabbed him in the throat with a bowie knife. Judge Terry knew better than to expect any real protection from the police, so he fled to the camp of a rival gang of outlaws, who called themselves the "Law and Order Men." The Vigilantes stormed the camp and captured the fugitive, and if Hopkins had died, as everybody expected, they would certainly have hanged Judge Terry. Hopkins finally got well, and Judge Terry was allowed to go back to the supreme bench, after several weeks of illegal confinement in the Vigilante Jail.

In 1856, for reasons not quite clear today, the Vigilantes suddenly decided to disband. On August 18th, according to Emerson Hough, they "marched openly in review through the streets of the city, five thousand one hundred and thirty-seven men in line, with three companies of artillery, eighteen cannon, a company of dragoons, and a medical staff of forty-odd physicians. After the parade the men halted, the assemblage broke up into companies, the companies into groups; and thus quietly, with no vaunting of themselves and no concealment of their acts, there passed away one of the most singular and significant organizations of American citizens ever known."

The last act of the Vigilantes was the distribution of a printed statement defending their activities, even to the treasons, murders and robberies which many of the members had admitted. This published defense ended with a threat that, if the occasion demanded it, they would reorganize and take over the city and state government again! A great deal has been written for and against the Vigilante outlaws, but there is no question that this parting threat had a potent influence in California politics for many years after the organization disbanded.

### IV.

One of the most notorious of the early Western gunfighters was Henry Plummer, the outlaw sheriff who terrorized the goldfields in the 60's. Plummer was a New Englander, and it is said that he was born of a good Connecticut family in 1837. A dark, slender, quiet young man, there was nothing of the traditional desperado in his appearance. He was well educated, and spoke good English, in a manner sometimes regarded as "sissy" on the frontier. But nobody laughed at Plummer's mincing speech, because he was the best pistol-shot in the Idaho Territory, and had killed many men in duels and street fights.

When Plummer first appeared in Lewiston, Idaho, he was merely a gambler, but was soon led into serious crime. It was at Lewiston that he began to organize his gang, which grew in time to be the most desperate band of robbers and murderers in that whole region. Masked robbers began by stopping gold shipments on the trails from the mines, but Plummer stayed behind his respectable faro layout in town, and nobody suspected that he was connected with the road-agents. He was a prominent member of the local Vigilantes, and made violent speeches advocating the suppression of the outlaw element.

Finally Plummer's band of robbers became so large that it outnumbered the honest people nearly two to one. Pack trains and stages were stopped by such large bodies of armed men that resistance was useless. In some camps the robbers just took over all property without any disguise at all, and anybody who objected was shot down at once. All this time Plummer was plotting with the enemies of the robber gang, and nobody suspected him. He was known as a gambler and a killer, but his gambling was apparently honest and his killings seemed to be open and above-board. By reason of his skill with the six-shooter he rid the country of several desperadoes who had bullied citizens and frightened people in the streets. These combats were regarded as duels, and were not at all to Plummer's discredit.

Plummer played the game this way at five or six camps in the Idaho Territory, which then included most of Montana, and finally settled down in Bannack, which was a very tough town indeed. After Plummer had established himself there, his men followed singly and in small groups, and gradually absorbed everything just as they had done in Lewiston.

There was one man in Bannack who annoyed the robbers a bit—a certain Jack Crawford, who had recently been elected sheriff. They decided to kill Crawford, and since it was best that this be accomplished in a fair fight, with witnesses present, Plummer was chosen to do the job. There were many proficient gun-fighters in the band, but none so fast and deadly as Plummer. Crawford was a cautious fellow, and Plummer was unable to pick a fight with him. Finally Crawford shot Plummer at long range with a rifle, and the bullet shattered his right wrist. Thereupon Crawford fled the country, and Plummer spent most of his time learning to shoot with his left hand.

Plummer's secret organization had by this time become strong enough to control the elections, and shortly after Jack Crawford's flight they made Plummer sheriff. At the same time they got control of the court which settled mining-claim disputes in the district. Plummer appointed members of his gang to serve as deputy sheriffs, and they soon "had the world by the tail on a down-hill pull," as one chronicler expressed it.

The gang had confederates planted everywhere, at mines and shipping points. Whenever the stage-coach from Virginia City carried a large shipment of gold, a Plummer man made a secret mark on the harness, which was noted by other gangsters at various points along the trail. At a prearranged time the stage was stopped by a large company of masked riders, and the gold carried off into the hills. As soon as Sheriff Plummer was notified he rode out at the head of a posse of his deputies, and made a great show of pursuing the robbers. What he really did, of course, was to destroy all evidence which might lead to their capture. If a passenger on the stage told officers that he could identify any of the highwaymen, he was quietly murdered. Some of these murders were done by the sheriff himself. And even at this stage of the game it appears that the honest people in Bannack never suspected that Sheriff Plummer was in league with the outlaws.

Finally Plummer himself stuck up a fellow named Tilden, and Tilden told a friend in confidence that the masked bandit "looked uncommon like Sheriff Plummer." Somebody else recognized George Ives, one of Plummer's chief deputies, when he robbed the passengers of a stage. A little later the guards who accompanied a gold shipment fired at some bandits and wounded two of them, so that two more of Plummer's deputies had to hide out in the hills while their wounds healed. The murder of a boy named Tiebalt enraged a lot of miners about this time, and some amateur sleuths raded a building where several deputy sheriffs lived. In this place they found a trunk full of pistols, and some of these weapons were identified as belonging to men who had been killed by the robbers, or who had mysteriously disappeared from the camps.

The miners talked these things over privately for several weeks,

and then suddenly the anti-Plummer faction burst out in open revolt. Two thousand armed men began milling around Virginia City, where they arrested several of Plummer's men and held a sort of kangaroo trial known as "the miners' court." A fellow called Long John, to save his own neck, testified that he had seen George Ives murder young Tiebalt. So the miners' court voted to hang George Ives and did so immediately, despite the protests of other deputies who shouted that the whole thing was illegal, and that every man who assisted at the hanging would be prosecuted for murder as soon as Sheriff Plummer could be notified.

Long John, Red Yeager and others confirmed the miners' suspicion that Plummer was the chief of the outlaws, and a party of armed men took him by surprise, before he had heard about the revolt. They caught Plummer in his shirt-sleeves, without his pistols, and hanged him to his own scaffold in the jail yard. They hanged about twenty other fellows too, most of them deputy sheriffs. These men were tough, and they all died game except Plummer himself. The outlaw sheriff lost his nerve, wept and prayed, and offered to do *anything* if only the miners wouldn't hang him.

Before his execution Plummer wrote a letter to his wife back East, who knew nothing of his criminal activities. In this letter he told her that a "parcel of ruffians" were about to murder him because of his patriotism—Plummer was a Union man, while a majority of the miners were Confederate sympathizers. For some time after Plummer's death, many people believed that he was a victim of persecution, and his family regarded him as a hero and a martyr who died trying to enforce the law. Plummer's wife came West, interviewed many of the miners, and examined such records as were available. Finally even she became convinced that Plummer was guilty of murder and robbery, and that his execution was justified.

#### IV.

One Western "bad man" who had a great reputation, written up at length by Mark Twain and a host of lesser chroniclers, was Joseph A. Slade. The legend persists to this day, but the truth is that Slade was not really a desperado at all.

Slade came originally from Illinois, and after serving in the Mexican War he wandered West and got a job with the Overland Stage Company. He was quiet and well-behaved when sober, but often became abusive after taking a few drinks. He fell into the habit of raising disturbances in bars and bawdy-houses, threatening the respectable customers, and firing his pistol aimlessly about in the streets. Only the fact that many people admitted a sheepish liking for the man saved him from being shot down long before his newspaper notoriety was achieved. "Slade was a likeable feller, when he was sober," said one of the men who hanged him.

It was generally reported that Slade had killed more than fifty men, as many as six in one evening, but the truth is that he killed only one man in the whole course of his career. The man he killed was a big French horse-thief known as Jules Reni. Jules threatened Slade's life many times, and one day he fired at Slade twice with a shotgun. As Slade lay on the ground he heard Jules telling somebody to bury him. Slade was bleeding from thirteen buckshot wounds, but he muttered that he would get up presently and cut Jules' ears off. Jules approached the wounded man, but it seemed obvious that Slade was dying, so the Frenchman just shrugged his shoulders and walked away. Some frontier officers arrested Jules, but released him when he promised to leave the country.

When Slade recovered from his injuries he learned that Jules was still in the vicinity, that he had defied the officers, and that he threat-

ened to "finish the job" the next time he encountered Slade. Some of Slade's men captured Jules and brought him in. The moment Slade caught sight of the unarmed prisoner, he fired, the bullet striking Jules in the mouth. Jules fell to the ground, and began to shout that he wanted to make a will. A man hurried into the house to bring pen and ink, but while in the house he heard another shot, and came out to find that Slade had shot Jules through the head, killing him instantly.

This is the sorry tale of what really happened that day, but the Slade legend grew by leaps and bounds. The story was that Slade had hunted Jules down relentlessly on foot, marched him forty miles across the desert, and tied him up to a post in the Slade dooryard. Then he stood back at a distance of fifteen measured yards and began shooting at Jules with his revolver, clipping off an ear, part of a foot, a knee-cap and so on, always calling his shots before he fired. After an hour or so of this amusement Slade grew weary, and finished off the poor Frenchman with a merciful bullet through the head. This done, the story relates that Slade cut off one of the dead man's ears, dried and varnished it, and wore it as a watch-charm. There were plenty of old-timers, many years later, who swore that they had actually seen Slade strutting about with Jules' ear swinging on his watch-chain!

Slade was not punished for the cowardly murder of Jules, because Jules had been a thief and a bully, and most of the citizens were glad to get rid of him. But the "bad man" legend was the cause of Slade's downfall. He began to strut and snarl and frighten travelers, thus becoming so unpopular that he lost his job with the Overland company. Several years later, at Alder Gulch, he became such a nuisance that the miners' court decided to hang him on general principles! "My God! My God! Must I die?" cried the make-believe bad man. "My God, men, you surely don't mean to hang me! Oh, my poor wife!" It is said that some of Slade's executioners were moved to tears by his lamentations, but they went right ahead and hanged him just the same.

Slade's wife rode into town as soon as she heard of the hanging. She cursed the miners' court, crying that poor Slade had never done anything worse than drink too much, and boast of his imaginary killings. Besides, she said, if they were set on killing him, he should have been shot—hanging is a disgraceful death. She took Slade's body home and preserved it in alcohol, refusing to have it buried with other outlaws in the local graveyard. A year or two later she shipped the pickled corpse down to Salt Lake City, where it was interred in a Mormon cemetery.

## VI.

The desperadoes treated so far in this book were associated mainly with the Mississippi River traffic and the goldfields, but the most glamorous gun-fighters of all were those who lived and died in the cattle country. Many of these fellows were notorious enough to find their way into the history-books, but the prize example of them all is Wild Bill Hickok. One of the best pistol shots that ever lived, Wild Bill killed more men in single combat than any other American. Most of these affrays occurred in public places, often in the full sight of large crowds. The killings attributed to Wild Bill Hickok, unlike those of Slade and other newspaper bad men, are as well authenticated as any other incidents of the period.

Wild Bill's real name was James Butler Hickok, and he was born on an Illinois farm in 1837. He came to Kansas before the Civil War, and was somehow involved with the border outlaws who rode with the notorious Jim Lane. Hickok served in eastern Kansas as a constable at the age of 19, and was already known as an unusually good shot with the revolver. Later he became a guard for the Overland stage-coach outfit, supposed to protect the passengers and company property from Indians and other marauders.

Bill was a tall, slender chap then, with blue eyes and long yellow hair. He was quiet, and despite his reputation as an expert shot, the hard cases of the West were inclined to underestimate him, until his great battle with the McCandles gang in 1861. He was guarding the Overland horse-herd at Rock Creek, not far from Topeka, when the station was attacked by a gang of outlaws. When he saw that there were ten of these fellows, led by the notorious McCandles brothers, Bill fled into his little sod shanty and barred the door. After some shouted insults, the outlaws found a piece of timber and battered their way into the dugout.

When the door crashed, Bill had a single-shot rifle in his hands, and with this he killed Jim McCandles, the first to appear in the doorway. The others rushed in immediately, and Bill shot down three of them with a revolver, and stabbed several others. By this time Bill had been shot four times and stabbed twice, and he was never very clear about what happened after that. "I knew I was all cut and shot to pieces," he said later. "I just got sort of wild." When he came to himself, six of the outlaws lay dead, and four were trying to get away. Bill picked up a rifle, staggered to the door, and killed one of these fellows just as he was scrambling into the saddle. A moment later Bill shot another one, and wounded him so badly that he died the next day.

It is quite a thing for one man to whip ten gun-fighters, and kill eight of them, all in the space of four or five minutes. Many Westerners regarded Bill Hickok's defeat of the McCandles gang as a sort of minor miracle, and one newspaper writer compared the fight to the battle of Hastings and the fall of Troy. Even the conservative Emerson Hough described it as "the greatest fight of any one man against odds at close range that is mentioned in any history of any part of the world!"

Bill Hickok thought himself mortally wounded, and most of his friends thought so, too, but he recovered after nearly a year of frontier "doctoring." He was through with the Overland Stage job, however, and went to work as a civilian teamster for the Union Army in 1862. His wagon-train was captured by the Confederates, but Bill escaped after killing four of the enemy. Later on, still a civilian, he became a sharp-shooter and is said to have killed thirty-five men at the battle of Elkhorn Tavern. Some writers have asserted that it was Bill Hickok who picked off General McCullough at Pea Ridge, but there is no evidence that Bill himself ever made this claim.

Next he served as a spy in Missouri and Arkansas, even enlisting in the Confederate Army in order to get information, serving under General Kirby Smith and also with General Sterling Price. Finally Bill was recognized and about to be shot as a spy, but managed to kill his guard and escape. It was a narrow squeeze, however, and Bill Hickok gave up spying for good. He refused to enlist, but followed along with Federal troops in Missouri, serving as a volunteer scout under General Davis. Emerson Hough tells us that during this period "he rode out on his own hook, and was stopped by three men who ordered him to halt and dismount. All three had their hands on their revolvers; but, to show the difference between average men and a specialist, Bill killed two of them and fatally wounded the other before they could get into action."

When the War was over, Bill Hickok was 28 years old, and was said to have killed about seventy men, not counting Indians. Perhaps fifty of these were Confederate soldiers that Bill shot with a rifle during the War; the others were killed in personal combat, nearly all of them with the revolver and the bowie-knife. Bill had been wounded many times. From head to foot he was covered with knife scars and bullet-marks.

A strikingly handsome man, he wore his yellow hair very long, preferred the flashy clothes affected by frontier gamblers, and "walked like a tiger," as one of his contemporaries remarked. He was very quiet,

but was justly regarded as quick-tempered and dangerous. He had come to regard himself as a professional gun-fighter now, and was always on the alert. He realized that there were plenty of Western bravos who would like to kill him, just for the sake of the reputation this act would assure the man who beat the celebrated Wild Bill Hickok to the draw.

When Bill wandered into Springfield, Mo., shortly after the war, he attracted no particular attention. The people in Springfield had seen many long-haired gentlemen with ready six-shooters. Bill spent most of his time gambling, but some say he served for a short period as a peace officer in Springfield.

It was in Springfield that he killed a gambler, one Dave Tutt. The old-timers in Springfield were all agreed that Tutt was killed in a fair fight, and that Bill shot him with a revolver from the opposite side of the public square, in full daylight. But they are not agreed about what caused the shooting. Some say that Dave Tutt had laughed at Bill's loud clothes, others think that the two had quarreled over the ownership of a silver watch. There were, a few years ago, old men in Springfield who could tell you all about it, and point out the exact spot where Bill stood when he fired the fatal shot. But these accounts do not agree in many important particulars, and we shall probably never know the whole truth about the Tutt-Hickok trouble.

After this difficulty in Springfield, Bill went to Nebraska, where four gunmen attacked him in a saloon. Bill killed three of them and badly wounded the fourth, but was shot twice in the right shoulder. While recuperating from these wounds he wandered out to Hays City, Kansas—one of the toughest cow-towns in the whole West. There were only about 2000 permanent residents in Hays City, but they had more than 100 gambling-hells and whore-houses, with bars and dance-halls everywhere. Cattlemen from all over the territory rode into Hays City to spend their money and blow off steam. In this process they had shot so many town marshals that nobody could be found to serve in this capacity. Wild Bill Hickok was offered the job and he took over at once, killing two of the local bad men before a week was out.

This was the most dangerous situation Bill had ever been in so far, and he took such precautions as appeared advisable. An old man in Hays City described Bill's method of patrolling the town at night. According to this informant, it was Bill's custom to walk down the middle of the street, with a sawed-off shotgun held ready in both hands, both barrels cocked. He carried a big Colts six-shooter in his holster, a Williamson .41 derringer in his pocket, and a razor-edged bowie knife stuck in a red sash which he tied round his middle.

Despite these precautions, Bill was ambushed by a group of drunken soldiers from Fort Hays, who shot him seven times. Bill killed three soldiers and wounded several more; he was left lying in the street, as his assailants thought he was dying. Some friends concealed him for several weeks, while soldiers under General Phillip Sheridan made a house-to-house search for him in Hays City. Had Bill been caught then, it is likely that his career would have ended abruptly. It was very bad luck to go about killing soldiers in those days. As soon as he was able to travel, Bill sneaked out of Hays City in the dead of night, and kept very quiet for some time.

The next we hear of Wild Bill Hickok he was in New York City, where somebody had persuaded him to cash in on his growing reputation by becoming an actor. Poor Bill did his best, strutting about in buckskins and firing blank cartridges. Bill was not a very intelligent man, but he had sense enough to realize that play-acting was not his dish. After a few weeks he gave up the enterprise and returned to Kansas. He did not venture into Hays City this time, but got a job as city marshal at Abilene. Abilene was just about as tough a camp as Hays City, but there was no army post there.

Two hours after Bill was sworn in as marshal a man came tearing

up the main street, firing his pistols right and left. When Bill shouted at this man the fellow paid no attention, except to fire two shots at the new marshal. The shots missed, but Bill was annoyed and killed the man instantly. A few hours later, as he walked down the street in the semi-darkness, Bill saw a man snatch something out of his pants pocket. Bill supposed that the fellow was drawing a weapon, and shot him dead. A moment later he identified the corpse as one of his own deputies, and the object that had flashed from his pocket was only a white handkerchief. Bill was much depressed by this accident, but it couldn't be helped. His life depended upon the fact that he could shoot quicker than other people, and he could not stop to scrutinize possible assailants too closely. Several other unpleasant incidents marred his stay at Abilene. Finally, learning that some crooked bankers had offered a reward of \$5000 to any man who could kill him, Wild Bill left Abilene for parts unknown, and we lose sight of him for some time.

There are stories of our hero fighting Indians in the Black Hills during this "vague period," but the first definite news of Bill Hickok came from Deadwood, S. D., in 1876. Bill had no job in Deadwood, but picked up a slim living by gambling. One day he was playing poker in a saloon when a local bad man named McCall slipped up behind the great gun-fighter and shot him through the head. Thus died, at the ripe old age of 39, the greatest pistol-shootin' gunman of all time.

Bill Hickok was a rather stupid man, and a densely ignorant one. He could not write an ordinary letter, or keep a diary, or memorize a few simple sentences, or even make a list of the men he had killed. He was not sufficiently intelligent to be a good poker-player, and his boners at this game were laughed at all over the West—just as Sam Goldwyn's peculiar English furnishes merriment in Hollywood today. But he was a splendid fighting machine, having killed more than thirty gunmen in fair individual fight, and every one of these men fell with a weapon in his hand. Counting Indians and Confederates killed in battle, the score must have been well over 100. The fact that Bill was never tried for murder or even manslaughter gives one a strange insight into the nature of the time and place in which Wild Bill Hickok spent his life.

## VII.

There was never anything in the West comparable to the blood-feuds of the Appalachian region, which often persisted between certain families for generations. Feuds of this sort are characteristic of primitive places where large families and clans are settled permanently. They did not occur in the West because of the mixed and nomadic nature of its population. The cow-country had plenty of organized fighting, however, in the so-called cattle wars—no less bloody but of much shorter duration than the feuds of the mountaineers back East. These troubles were invariably called *wars*, and were actually regarded as such; men enlisted to fight on one side or the other, just as many of them had signed up for service in the War Between the States.

There were many of these little wars, but the most famous was the Lincoln County trouble which began in New Mexico in the early 70's and lasted for nearly a decade. The history of this conflict has always been obscure, and many widely different stories have been told in New Mexico. The first connected and authentic account of the Lincoln County War was published by Emerson Hough in 1905, and the facts set forth here are taken, in the main, from Hough's narrative.

At the end of the Civil War parts of Texas were full of unbranded cattle, and a big cattleman named John Chisum began to drive great herds of them North to market. It was this same John Chisum who gave his name to the famous Chisum Trail that the radio cowboys are still caterwauling about. Chisum owned perhaps 80,000 cattle

himself, and he had papers from hundreds of other ranchers which authorized him to pick up their cattle wherever found and market them with his own trail herds. Hough says that Chisum "carried a tin cylinder, as large as a water-spout, that contained, some said, more than a thousand of these powers of attorney."

Chisum employed a great number of riders, but it was inevitable that a good many Chisum steers were stolen in spite of all the herders' precautions. The rustlers were mostly small ranchers and nesters who had access to various local cattle markets, and many of these men were somehow associated with Major L. G. Murphy, a prosperous Lincoln County merchant. Murphy sold beef to the government and to the Indian agency, and much of this beef was said to have been stolen from the vast Chisum herds. In this situation, there was a great deal of fighting between Chisum's cowboys and the local cattle-thieves, the latter known as "Murphy men." Both factions naturally employed gun-fighters to protect their interests, and a great many were killed on both sides.

In 1874 four brothers named Harold settled in Lincoln County, and were "staked" by Major Murphy. One evening they rode into town and raised a disturbance, so that the local officers tried to arrest them. In the fight which followed, Bill Harold was killed. Killed also was Deputy Sheriff Gillam, a constable named Martinez, and another man known as Dave Warner. From that day forward Jack, Tom and Bob Harold made war on the anti-Murphy forces which they thought were responsible for Bill Harold's death. The Harolds were from Texas, and they called in other Texans to help them in their enterprises. Between fifty and seventy-five men, and two women, were killed as a result of the Harold trouble.

About this time Alexander McSween, a Presbyterian preacher, appeared in the town of Lincoln. There was no opening for a minister in the vicinity, but McSween had once studied law, so he set up as an attorney. He was not very successful at the bar, and soon went into the mercantile business in partnership with J. H. Tunstall, a young Englishman who lived on a cattle-ranch near Lincoln. Major Murphy did not approve of these new competitors, while McSween claimed that Murphy had stolen funds belonging to the county, and should be ridden out on a rail.

There were many legal and financial conflicts between Murphy's people and the new firm of McSween & Tunstall, and finally Murphy sent the sheriff out to serve an attachment on some of Tunstall's cattle. Sheriff Brady took a posse with him, and somehow they killed Tunstall. Many people who had no use for Preacher McSween thought very highly of young Tunstall, who had never cheated anybody. They regarded Tunstall's death as a cold-blooded murder, and it caused many honest people to join the McSween faction who would never have done so in the ordinary course of events.

Fighting became general in Lincoln County now, and nobody could be tried for any crime, because the circuit judge was so frightened that he refused to hold court there at all. A group of McSween gunmen killed Sheriff Brady and one of his deputies in the street. From this time forward there were two sheriffs in Lincoln County; one George W. Peppin, appointed by the governor, and John Copeland, elected by the followers of McSween. The McSween outlaws finally fortified themselves in the McSween house. Murphy's men, led by Sheriff Peppin, fired at every McSween head that showed itself. One of McSween's men took a Sharps .50 buffalo-gun and killed a Murphy sentry at a distance of 900 yards—a phenomenal shot even for New Mexico.

A troop of United States cavalry came out from the Fort, but refused to interfere unless Sheriff Peppin called for assistance, which he refused to do. McSween's wife walked out through a hail of bullets and asked the commanding officer to help her husband, but the colonel

naturally refused to use United States troops to protect outlaws against the sheriff who had been duly appointed by the governor. After three days of fighting, the sheriff's men succeeded in setting the McSween house afire, so that the defenders were forced out. Most of them, including Preacher McSween, were shot to death by the officers. A few of the McSween gunmen escaped, and we shall hear more of these later.

The big battle in Lincoln did not end the war by any means. Murphy had died in Santa Fe a few days before the fight, McSween and Tunstall were both dead, most of McSween's property was destroyed, Murphy had left no cash, and John Chisum's connection with the McSween estate was obscure and disputed. The county was full of armed desperadoes who had been hired by the two factions, and many of them had not been paid. Chisum might pay some of McSween's men, but who was to settle with the Murphy gun-fighters? Mrs. McSween hired a one-armed lawyer from Las Vegas to help settle matters, but one of Murphy's gunmen killed this lawyer when he refused to dance in the street. The British legation sent men from Washington to investigate Tunstall's death, and demanded cash indemnity from the United States Government, which was finally paid.

One of the Murphy men was arrested for the murder of Mrs. McSween's lawyer, but was allowed to escape. President Hayes issued a federal proclamation calling upon both factions to "lay down their arms." General Lew Wallace, the newly appointed governor of New Mexico, tried to investigate some of the murders, but made no progress at all. In the end, all of the gunmen escaped—not one was ever punished for any of the Lincoln County killings. Emerson Hough concludes his account of the trouble by observing that "the fighting was so desperate and so prolonged that it came to be held as warfare and not as murder." And it is so regarded in Lincoln County to this day.

## VIII.

One of the McSween gunmen who escaped from the burning house in Lincoln, N. M., was William H. Bonney, known throughout the West as Billy the Kid. Born in New York City, Billy was brought as a child to Coffeyville, Kansas, and later lived at various camps in Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. It was at Silver City, New Mexico, when he was only twelve years old, that the Kid killed his first man. When a cowpuncher slapped him in a barroom fight, Billy cut the man's belly open with a jack-knife and fled to the Apache reservation in Arizona.

Billy must have been about sixteen when he went to work for John Chisum, the cattle king. He had some sort of a quarrel with Chisum, and left his employ in 1877. A few months later he appeared in Lincoln County and got a job on the ranch owned by J. H. Tunstall. Since Tunstall was a partner of Preacher McSween, it is easy to see how Billy was drawn into the McSween gang of hired gun-fighters. When Tunstall was killed by a Murphy posse in 1873, the Kid joined the other McSween gangsters in fighting the Murphy faction, and is said to have killed many of them in cold blood. He was present when Sheriff Brady and his deputy were shot down in the street at Lincoln, but whether the Kid himself did the shooting is not clear.

Most of the men who have written about the Kid described him as a pleasant, smiling chap; people who saw him for the first time were always surprised that such a nice looking young fellow could be a professional killer. He was slender, about five feet eight inches in height. He had a rather long face, and his front teeth were a bit too large. His hair was brown, and his eyes were gray. There is only one photograph of Billy the Kid in existence—the only one ever made, so far as I know. It shows him standing against a photographer's backdrop, with a Winchester in his hand and a six-shooter at his belt. He is not smiling in this picture. He looks pretty stupid, but at the same time

physically alert. Looking at this unretouched photograph, it is hard to see how so many people could have regarded him as a pleasant, smiling young man. In this picture, he looks like a killer, and that's what he was.

After he got away from the McSween house in Lincoln County, the Kid claimed that the "murderin' preacher" owed him some money, and many people thought that he collected this at the point of a pistol from John Chisum, who had backed McSween in his fight against the Murphy faction. John Chisum was far from being a timid man, but he didn't want any trouble with Billy the Kid. They were betting three to one in New Mexico that the Kid would kill Chisum, but he did not do so. Chisum died of cancer in 1884, at Eureka Springs, Mo.

If the Kid ever collected his money from Chisum it didn't last long, for we soon find him down in the Pecos country leading a gang of horse-thieves. Charlie Bowdre was with him, also Doc Skurlock, Tom O'Folliard, Jack Middleton, Dave Rudabaugh, Tom Pickett, Billy Wilson and several other tough hombres. This gang killed several men, in the course of their horse-stealing expeditions. It is said that they stole some of Chisum's cattle, and shot a number of Chisum riders. The Kid killed several desperadoes in private quarrels, too. In 1880 a Texas bad-man named Grant announced his intention of killing the Kid, just to build up his reputation as a gun-fighter. Witnesses said that Grant approached with his pistol drawn, while the Kid's weapon was still in his holster. But Billy shot Grant through the head twice, before he could fire a shot.

The Kid's gang was growing in numbers and influence now, and they began to behave as if they owned the Pecos country. The Kid made a bad mistake when he murdered Jimmy Carlisle, who was a very popular young man. Carlisle had been deputized and served with a posse, but he walked unarmed into the Kid's stronghold, and was shot down without a chance for his life.

After Carlisle's death, the forces of law and order began to close in on the Kid. Pat Garrett had just been elected sheriff, and Garrett was a bad man to tangle with. Another enemy of the Kid's was Frank Stewart, an officer employed by an organization of cattlemen. Also it seems that the Kid had thoughtlessly murdered a government clerk named Bernstein, on a government reservation. This crime brought a federal detective, one A. F. Wilde, into the picture.

Garrett and his posse pursued members of the gang on several occasions, and finally Garrett met Tom O'Folliard in the road and shot him to death. A few hours later Garrett's men surrounded the rest of the gang in a stone ranch-house, and killed Charlie Bowdre as he came out of the building, apparently unaware that the officers were anywhere about. The others held out for some time, but they had nothing to eat, and finally surrendered when Garrett promised to take them directly to Santa Fe and to protect them from mob violence on the way. The Kid was acquitted of the Bernstein killing, but convicted of the murder of Sheriff Brady and sentenced to hang at Lincoln, May 13, 1881.

The jail at Lincoln was part of the old Murphy store building, and the Kid was kept handcuffed all the time until the date set for his hanging. He was guarded by two officers—J. W. Bell and Bob Ollinger. Bell was a quiet fellow, but Ollinger was a murderous ruffian who stalked about in a fringed buckskin shirt, picking his teeth with a twelve-inch bowie knife. Ollinger said publicly that he hoped the Kid would try to escape, so that somebody would have a good excuse to kill him. The Kid in turn announced that he should certainly kill Ollinger if he ever got a chance. Ollinger only laughed, and made sure that the outlaw was handcuffed at all times, with heavy irons on his legs as well.

One evening, about two weeks before the time of the hanging, the Kid somehow slipped one hand out of the cuffs. Instantly he struck Bell over the head with the iron, and snatched the officer's revolver. A moment later he killed Bell, unlocked the door, picked up a sawed-off

shotgun, and stepped out on a little balcony overlooking the street. Ollinger had gone out for supper, but came running back when he heard the shot that killed Bell. The Kid waited until Ollinger was very close, then riddled him with buckshot. Ollinger fell, and the Kid fired the second barrel into the prostrate body. Then he walked into the street, forced a man to bring him a file, and cut through one leg-iron so that he could mount a horse. The Kid had two loaded pistols now, and nobody tried to stop him as he rode slowly out of town.

If the Kid had fled across the Mexican border he could have gotten clear away—that's what the local officers expected him to do. But he persisted in hanging around Fort Sumner, in the Pecos valley north of Roswell. It is said that he had a sweetheart in that neighborhood. Pat Garrett learned of his whereabouts, and slipped into Sumner with two deputies. Garrett knew that the Kid would never surrender again, and that one or the other would be killed the next time they met.

Garrett sat in a dark room with one Pete Maxwell, in Maxwell's house. It was bright moonlight outside. The Kid came striding along in the moonlight, intending to visit Maxwell. Just as he arrived at Maxwell's door he saw Garrett's two deputies sitting on a wall some distance away. He could not have known that they were officers, or that Garrett was in town. But when he saw the men sitting there he called out *Quien es?*—"Who is it?" The men made no answer, and the Kid backed into the door of Maxwell's house.

As the Kid came into the house Garrett could see him plainly, but the Kid could not see Garrett well enough to recognize him. Nevertheless he must have suspected that something was wrong, because he had a self-cocking pistol in his hand. He pointed the weapon toward Garrett's dim shape in the corner. Garrett fired twice, one bullet striking the Kid in the heart and killing him instantly. The Kid's gun went off as he fell, but the bullet missed Garrett.

Billy the Kid's friends have compared him to Wild Bill Hickok, but the two had little in common beyond their incredible celerity with the six-shooter. Hickok may have been involved in some shady business occasionally—many good men were, on the frontier at that time—but he was not a professional criminal. Hickok made his living as a teamster, scout, gambler and peace officer. Billy the Kid was a horse-thief, a hired gunman, a cold-blooded murderer. As to the number of murders credited to the Kid, there are several different stories. Pat Garrett testified that, to his knowledge, the Kid had killed eleven men. Some of the Kid's associates said that he had killed twenty-one men—one for each year of his life. Probably this latter estimate is not far from the truth.

## IX.

The saga of the James and Younger boys began in the Kansas-Missouri border warfare of the late 50's, where both James and Youngers serves their apprenticeship under the black flag of Quantrell's raiders. Charles William Quantrell was born in Maryland, and he and his older brother started for the California goldfields in 1856, when Charles was about 20 years old. Soon after entering Kansas Territory they were attacked by a band of robbers who called themselves Free-Soilers, and the elder brother was killed. Up to this time nothing is known of Quantrell's politics, but from that day forward he became a fanatical pro-slavery man. He gave up all idea of going to California, and threw himself with frenzied zeal into making war on the anti-slavery people in Kansas.

Kansas was the scene of a bitter conflict between pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces at the time, the former anxious to gain the state for slavery, the latter for freedom. Each party sent bands of armed immigrants into the territory, and something like a civil war ensued.

Bodies of pro-slavery men crossed over from Missouri, took possession of the polls, and controlled the elections. Settlements were attacked and looted, houses and buildings burned, men and women murdered in cold blood. The band of outlaws led by Charles Quantrell was always in the forefront of this bloody business.

Quantrell's raiders were mostly Missourians, superb horsemen, good shots with rifle and revolver, the latter being their favorite weapon. It was Quantrell and his gang who sacked the town of Lawrence, killing most of the male inhabitants, burning many buildings, and carrying off a great deal of plunder. Both Frank and Jesse James were present at the Lawrence raid, and it was said that these two brothers killed 65 men and boys that day, and wounded perhaps 25 more. This may be an exaggeration, but the truth is bad enough. At least one of the Younger boys was at Lawrence too, but we have no tally of his killing on that occasion.

Frank and Jesse James were the sons of a Baptist preacher who had come to Missouri from Kentucky. The Younger brothers—Cole, Jim and Bob—were the sons of a wealthy Missouri judge. The two families were somehow related, and some say that the James and Younger boys were first cousins. Both families had suffered severely at the hands of the Yankees. Jesse James' mother had an arm blown off, and one of her young children shot to death; Cole Younger's father was murdered, his home burned, and three of Cole's sisters locked up in a rickety barracks which blew down and killed two of them. It is no wonder that the James and Younger boys were bitter against the Federals. They rode with Quantrell's outlaw troops all through the Civil War. Quantrell was killed in 1865, and the Confederate army surrendered in the same year. But the James and Younger boys did not surrender, saying that they did not believe the War was over!

In 1866 the James and Younger brothers had organized a small band of robbers, with headquarters in Clay County, Missouri. This region was pretty wild in those days, but the James-Younger outlaws knew every foot of it. Many of the settlers were related to them by blood or marriage, as well as by political sympathies, and were glad to protect the outlaws whenever possible. For more than twenty years the James-Younger gang fooled or bribed the officers of the Middle West, and robbed banks from Minnesota to Mexico. They robbed trains, too, and were not above sticking up stage-coaches on occasion. Their loot totaled more than half a million dollars in cash, which was a tremendous sum of money in those days.

The James-Younger outlaws had been reared in a very hard school, and did not hesitate to kill innocent people. Jesse James in particular was inclined to shoot anybody who happened to come along while a robbery was in progress. Finally Governor Crittenden of Missouri arranged with several railroads and express companies to offer large rewards for each of the robbers, dead or alive. It is said that \$30,000 was the price set upon the head of Jesse James, who was regarded as the leader of the band.

It was in 1882 that Robert Ford, cousin to the James boys, decided to kill Jesse in order to get the reward. Ford was only 19 years old, and he imagined that the man who killed the famous outlaw would become a sort of national hero. Jesse James was living in St. Joseph, Mo., under the name of Thomas Howard. Bob Ford and his brother Charles were in the house with Jesse one day, and Jesse had laid aside his pistols. It is said that Jesse was standing upon a chair, to straighten a picture hanging on the wall, when Cousin Bob shot him in the back of the head. Ford never got much of the reward money, and what he did get was soon frittered away. He was killed in a drunken fight somewhere in Colorado, about ten years later.

Frank James surrendered to Governor Crittenden at Jefferson City, a few months after Jesse's death. They sentenced him to life imprisonment, but a few years of prison life ruined his health. He seemed to be

dying of tuberculosis, and some governor pardoned him. Frank James lived for many years after his release, and served for a long time as doorkeeper in a St. Louis theatre. He was often seen about race-tracks, in the company of professional gamblers and horse-players. But he seemed to have lost all interest in robbery and the like, and there is no evidence that he ever made a crooked move after his release from prison.

The James-Younger gang robbed scores of banks—nobody now living can say just how many—but the most sensational job they ever did was the robbery at Northfield, Minn., in 1876. This expedition was undertaken by Frank and Jesse James, Jim and Bob Younger, Clel Miller, Charley Pitts and Bill Stiles. Cole Younger at first refused to have any part in the Northfield robbery, predicting that the project would end in disaster, but at the last moment he decided to string along with his brothers.

They all rode into Northfield on the morning of September 7, 1876, well mounted and well armed. As usual the outlaws began by clearing the streets, firing at the heels of the fleeing citizens. Jesse James, Bob Younger and Charlie Pitts dismounted and strode into the bank, shooting a young clerk through the shoulder as they entered. Cashier J. L. Haywood refused to open the safe, and Pitts stabbed him twice, but in such a way that he was not seriously hurt. The firing outside became so heavy that they decided to withdraw without attempting to force the safe. Gathering up what loose money was available, they started to leave the bank. As they went out, Jesse turned and shot Cashier Haywood through the head, killing him. The three ran down the steps of the bank, but some doctor fired from his office window with a rifle, and killed Bill Stiles. A moment later another citizen mortally wounded Clel Miller. The rest of the outlaws rode out of town, firing as they went. When they stopped for a moment, a mile or so down the road, it was discovered that every man had one or more bullets in him.

What was left of the James-Younger gang worked South as best they could, pursued by large posses everywhere. The State of Minnesota offered a \$1000 reward for each bandit, dead or alive. They wrangled bitterly among themselves, each blaming the others for his failure, with Cole Younger reminding everybody that he had been against the plan from the start. About a week after the robbery, Frank and Jesse James left the others and struck out for themselves. They were both seriously wounded, and had only one horse between them. But somehow they got as far as Sioux Falls, Iowa, where they captured a doctor and forced him to treat their wounds. They stole horses, bribed officers and hired teamsters, and finally got back to Missouri where they were comparatively safe. They figured it was better not to stay there, however, so they drifted on down to Mexico and holed up south of the Border for several months.

Charlie Pitts stuck with Cole, Jim and Bob Younger, and the four managed to elude their pursuers for another week of agony. Finally they were surrounded in a little patch of timber on the Watonwan River. There were more than 150 armed men in the posse, and it is said that 1000 shots were fired. A sheriff named Glispin shot and killed Pitts early in the fight. Cole Younger had a bullet in his thigh, where he had been shot two weeks before in Northfield; now he got twelve more bullets in various parts of his body, and one rifle-ball in the head, so it appeared that he would surely die. Jim Younger's lower jaw was shot away, and he had eight buckshot in his body, besides a 50-caliber rifle bullet in his shoulder. Bob Younger was the only one who could stand up, but his right arm was broken, and there was a revolver bullet in his side.

Several members of the posse were in favor of killing all three of the Youngers at once, but Sheriff Glispin insisted on taking them to the county jail. All pleaded guilty to murder in the first degree, and were sentenced to life imprisonment. Bob Younger died in prison, in

1889. Cole and Jim were paroled in 1901, but Jim committed suicide a few weeks after he was freed. Cole recovered his health and traveled about the country with a Wild West Show—I saw him in Joplin, Mo., about 1904. Cole became very religious in his old age, and made a great show of attending church and Sunday-school. He was a benevolent-looking old fellow, and the children in the streets used to call him "Uncle Cole." He died in his bed at Lees Summit, Mo., in 1916. So ended the notorious Younger boys, and everybody said it was a good riddance.

## X.

The Dalton family lived south of Coffeyville, Kansas, just across the Oklahoma border. Oklahoma was the Indian Territory in those days, and was probably the wildest bit of country in the United States at that time. The whole region was full of bad Indians and worse whites, and became the natural haven of criminals who had fled the law in other sections of the West. When a gun-fighter became too tough for Texas, or Kansas, or Colorado, or New Mexico, there was nothing for it but to take refuge in the Territory.

Lewis Dalton was born in Kentucky, but had moved to Missouri in the early days, where he had made some contact with the James and Younger families. In 1851 he married Adelaide Younger and moved into the Territory. He and Adelaide raised a big family—nine sons and four daughters. One of the boys was named Coleman, always a common name in the Younger clan. Cole Dalton and several of his brothers were quiet, respectable citizens, and more than one of them became peace officers. Franklin Dalton was a Deputy United States Marshal, killed by a horse-thief near Fort Smith, Ark., in 1887. Grattan and Robert Dalton also served as Deputy Marshals for a time, and fought desperadoes and cattle-thieves all over the Territory.

Many of the United States Marshals were a little wild sometimes, and this was overlooked by their superiors, but when Grat and Bob Dalton took to stealing whole herds of horses and cattle the authorities were forced to take action. Both boys lost their commissions, and Grat was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment, but he broke out of jail before they could get him to the penitentiary. Bob and Grat, together with their younger brother Emmett, now fled into the wilds of the Territory, and definitely "went over to the wild bunch." They no longer made any pretense of working for their bread, but devoted themselves mostly to train-robbery.

Their procedure was very much like that of the James-Younger gang in Missouri. In May, 1891, they stopped the Santa Fe at Wharton, and looted the express car. They killed the station-agent at Wharton, and lost one of their men, a tough gunman named Bryant. Early in 1892 they robbed another Santa Fe train in the Cherokee Strip, and a Frisco passenger-train near Vinita. A little later they stuck up the Katy at Adair, I. T., where they killed one man and wounded several others, escaping with a lot of cash from the express-car. By this time the Dalton gang was notorious, all trains carried armed guards, and heavy rewards were posted by the railroads and express companies. The Daltons decided to quit train-robbery for awhile, but robbed several small banks just to keep in practice. They took \$10,000 from a little bank at El Reno without firing a shot.

It was shortly after the El Reno episode that Bob Dalton conceived the great idea that led to the downfall of the Dalton gang. There were two banks in Coffeyville, Kansas, and Bob decided to rob both of these banks simultaneously. This was something new in the history of bank-robbery. Even the James-Younger boys had never tried to knock off two banks in the same town at the same time.

The morning of Oct. 5, 1892, found the Dalton gang in camp near Coffeyville, on the bank of Onion Creek. Besides Bob, Grat and Emmett

Dalton, there were two other men present, who called themselves Dick Broadwell and Bill Powers. Shortly after nine o'clock they rode quietly into the town. All of them carried rifles and revolvers, but this attracted no attention in a town like Coffeyville. Ordinarily they would have left their horses in front of the banks, but the main street was being paved, so they had to tie their mounts in an alley about a block away. It was said later that the torn-up condition of the street probably sealed the doom of the Dalton gang.

Emmett and Bob Dalton strode briskly into the First National Bank. There were three bank employes inside, and four customers. Bob ordered Tom Ayres, the cashier, to bring money out of the vault and put it into a sack. Ayres brought out \$10,000 in bills, and a good deal of silver. Then Bob and Emmett told the customers to walk out at the front door, which they did. As Bob and Emmett started to follow them, however, several shots were fired by citizens in the street. When this happened the two robbers stepped back into the bank, and prepared to leave by another door at the rear of the building.

Meanwhile, at the Condon Bank across the street, things were not going so well. When Grat Dalton, Dick Broadwell and Bill Powers demanded the money, Cashier Ball produced only about \$4000, most of it in silver. Grat began shouting for more, but Ball said that the safe which contained the gold was fitted with a time-lock, and could not be opened for ten minutes. Grat suspected that this was a lie, but he knew nothing about time-locks, and decided to take a chance. Without a word he sat down, his cocked rifle pointed at Ball, to wait the required ten minutes. Long before the time was up the citizens outside began firing into the bank, breaking all the windows and pinking Broadwell in the left arm. Grat saw that it was no use, so he led Broadwell and Powers out of the bank by a side door.

The three came out into the street just as Bob and Emmett emerged from the other bank. All sorts of people, by this time, were milling about with firearms in their hands. Some of these amateur gun-fighters were firing almost at random, endangering each other as well as the bank-robbers. A man named Gump stood in the street with a shotgun, and was shot down at once, presumably by Bob Dalton. An instant later Bob shot and killed young Lucius Baldwin, who was flourishing a pistol in the alley. Charles Brown and George Cubine were killed also, either by Bob or Emmett. Cashier Ayers rushed out with a Winchester, and was shot through the head by Bob Dalton at a distance of seventy-five yards. T. A. Reynolds was shot by one of the Daltons, but was not seriously hurt. By this time Grat Dalton and Bill Powers were both mortally wounded, but continued firing, and Grat killed City Marshal Connolly. Dick Broadwell was riddled with bullets, but mounted his horse and rode several blocks before he fell dead. Bob Dalton, wounded several times, was finally shot to death by a livery-stable employe named Kloehr.

Emmett Dalton had been in the thick of all this shooting, but somehow got to his horse without being hit. He still carried a sack of money, too. Just as he sprang into the saddle two bullets struck him. Despite these wounds he rode back through very heavy fire to the place where Bob lay in the street, and tried to help his fallen brother up on the horse behind him. Bob knew that he was dying, and said so, profanely urging Emmett to get the hell out while he could. Just then one Carey Seaman ran up and emptied a shotgun into Emmett's back. Emmett fell from his horse, and raised one arm in token of surrender. Several men fired at him with pistols as he lay on the ground, but missed. Everybody thought that he was mortally wounded anyhow, and pretty soon some bystanders carried him into a doctor's office and laid him on the floor.

When the smoke cleared away eight men lay dead—four bank-robbers and four citizens. Four men were desperately wounded—one

robber and three citizens. Perhaps a dozen more townspeople were slightly wounded by gunfire, and several others were trampled, kicked by horses, cut by falling glass, and so on. The money taken from the banks was all recovered, and there was no property damage except some broken windows, and five or six horses which were shot in the street. Nobody knows how many shots were fired, but more than 80 bullet-marks were counted on the front of one bank. When I last visited Coffeyville, in 1914, one could still see here and there the marks of bullets fired at the Daltons in 1892. The robbers carried six-shooters but did not use them, preferring to rely upon their Winchesters. The citizens were armed with all sorts of firearms, pocket-pistols and the like, and it was the citizens who did most of the wild shooting.

There are old men in Coffeyville today who can give you eye-witness accounts of the Dalton raid, and one of these fellows showed me a ghastly photograph of the four dead bank-robbers lying on something that looks like a big cellar-door. Emmett Dalton recovered from his wounds, and served a term in the Kansas penitentiary. Later on he traveled about the country lecturing on the crime-doesn't-pay theme, and appeared in a moving picture about the exploits of the Dalton gang. A few years ago he wrote—or at least signed—a very good book entitled *When the Daltons Rode*. I met and talked with Emmett Dalton several times in the 1920's, when he said he was a realtor in California. He seemed to be a good realtor, too, and was doing very well at it.

There have been many murderers and robbers in the West since the Daltons' time, of course. But such fellows as Dillinger and "Pretty Boy" Floyd seem very small potatoes as compared with the old-time bandits. Crime today is an urban industry, with offices and secretaries and filing-cabinets and adding machines. The much-publicized "master minds of crime" are just scoundrels who have organized armies of thugs to put the squeeze on cheap crooks, prostitutes, politicians, drug peddlers and the like—rackets which the bandits of the old West would have scorned. I have met some of these big-shot gangsters, and they are no more interesting or romantic than a bunch of pot-gutted Rotarians.

The era of the old-time gun-fightin' outlaw really ended with the downfall of the Daltons that bloody day in Coffeyville. Times have changed, in crime as in everything else, and not always for the better.

